

Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force

In 2003, a workshop on beach vitex was hosted by the North Inlet-Winyah Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Georgetown, SC. This workshop brought together private citizens, personnel from different state and Federal agencies, and representatives from non-profit organizations, resulting in the formation of the South Carolina Beach Vitex Task Force. In 2005, North Carolina joined the effort and the name was changed to the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force. The objectives of the Task Force are to:

1. Detect and map beach vitex populations in coastal South Carolina and North Carolina.
2. Remove seedlings from public areas to prevent further spread.
3. Conduct an ecological assessment to determine beach vitex's impact on native plants and animals.
4. Research environmentally sound methods for removal.
5. Restore affected areas with native plants.
6. Educate homeowners, landscapers, and the general public about beach vitex.



What can you do to help?

1. *Don't plant beach vitex.* Contact The Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force for a list of beneficial native plants that can be used in landscaping.
2. *Attend a native plant training session sponsored by the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force.* Learn how to identify beach vitex and how to distinguish this plant from native plants.
3. *Notify the Task Force of any potential beach vitex you may find.* Don't try to do any removal yourself. The Task Force is mapping all locations in an effort to monitor this plant. Take note of where you have seen beach vitex and contact the Task Force.
4. *Volunteer!!* The Task Force needs volunteers to monitor our beaches and to help with projects. Get involved!!

Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force Partners:

BASF Corporation
Clemson University
North Inlet-Winyah Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
- University of South Carolina
Natural Resources Conservation Service
North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service
North Carolina and South Carolina Sea Turtle Networks
Town of Pawleys Island
Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation
SC Department of Health and Environmental Control -
Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management
SC Department of Natural Resources
SC Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism
SC Native Plant Society
US Army Corps of Engineers
US Fish and Wildlife Service
US Geological Survey



For more information and to report any suspected beach vitex locations, please contact:

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Melanie Doyle, NC BV Task Force Coordinator
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Randy Westbrooks, U.S. Geological Survey
(910)640-6435
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or visit the website at:

<http://www.beachvitex.org>

Beach Vitex : Carolinas Newest Coastal Menace





Beach vitex: growing season

Beach Vitex (*Vitex rotundifolia*)

A deciduous woody vine native to Korea and other countries in the western Pacific, this plant was introduced to the Southeastern United States in the mid-1980's for use as an ornamental and also for beach stabilization. By the mid-1990's, plant specialists began to notice beach vitex spreading from original plantings on North Carolina and South Carolina beaches, crowding out native dune plants and altering sea turtle nesting areas.



Beach vitex: fall foliage

Identification

Beach vitex leaves are round, silvery gray-green, 1-2 inches long, and have a spicy fragrance. The flowers are purplish-blue, 1 inch in width, and produce small clusters at the ends of branches. The round fruits are 1/4 inch in diameter and purplish-black when ripe. Growing at a rate of 10 feet or more per year, the plant typically grows up to 12 feet in diameter and can produce runners up to 60 feet long.



Good Plants...Bad Plants

Invasive species affect each of our lives, all regions of the U.S., and every nation in the world. One report indicates that the economic cost of invasive species to Americans is an estimated \$137 billion every year. Not only are there economic costs, but invasive species are costing the lives of our precious natural resources. Up to 46% of the plants and animals that are Federally listed as endangered have been negatively impacted by invasive species. Beach vitex joins an ever-growing list of invasive threats.

Besides being drought tolerant, salt tolerant, and fast-growing, beach vitex is a prolific seed producer. Seed production can be as high as 10,000 to 20,000 seeds per square meter. Seeds and other plant parts that are dispersed via animals, wind, or water easily colonize other areas besides the beaches. Beach vitex has recently been documented growing in salt marshes.



Sea Turtle Impacts

Beach vitex on the beaches of South Carolina and North Carolina is altering sea turtle nesting areas and is also costing the lives of newly emerged sea turtle hatchlings. Hatchlings become trapped in the thick tangle of vegetation, exhausting themselves and perishing before reaching the ocean.



Impacts on Native Vegetation

In areas where beach vitex has been found, native plants are being choked out. Sea oats, beach panic grasses and the Federally threatened seabeach amaranth cannot out-compete the fast growing beach vitex.



Seabeach amaranth

Beach Stabilization

A plant introduced to help stabilize our beaches is instead proving just the opposite. Beach vitex lacks the fibrous root system like the native plants of our beaches and thus, lacks the ability to trap sand adequately. As beach vitex dies back each winter, the root systems can be found exposed where the beach has literally eroded from underneath the plant, further jeopardizing our beaches.

